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4. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj: A Hero for Modern India

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Abstract

A motivated nationalist leader who fought and lived for his people, achieved success against heavy odds by sheer determination and dedication. His life is an example to be followed by young Indians. A great leader in every aspect, he converted his peasant population into a motivated and ferocious army which never surrendered and created the base of Maratha power which ultimately defeated the Mughal Empire.

Introduction

"Is there a greater hero, a greater saint, a greater bhakta and a greater king than Shivaji? Shivaji was the very embodiment of a born ruler of men as typified in our great Epics. He was the type of the real son of India representing the true consciousness of the nation. It was he who showed what the future of India is going to be sooner or later, a group of independent units under one umbrella as it were, under one supreme imperial suzerainty."

Chhatrapati Shivaji in the history of India, at a time when Hindus were experiencing great oppression and humiliation : they were being killed, their wives and children taken in slavery, their temples were being broken, and they were being discriminated against in various forms, such as in the matter of charging custom duties, restrictions on their fairs and festivals, their dismissal from government posts, large-scale conversions as a part of openly declared policy of the Mughal State, imposition of the religious tax *Jizya* for being a Hindu.. These discriminatory acts were then going almost unchallenged, although the Hindus formed more than 90% of the country at that time. Shivaji, who was endowed with talents of the highest order and a clear vision, was the only one who stood-up to the injustice. He had also an inspiring and endearing personality which spontaneously commanded respect, loyalty and the highest sacrifices from his devoted soldiery and peasants. To create his *Swarajya*, a bold mission, inspired by the highest ideals imbibed by him from his mother and the saints of Maharashtra, he had to rouse the sleeping conscience of the Hindus, and show them that it was possible to

successfully defy the Mughal power, cast off foreign domination and win freedom from the rule of the Muslim powers. Shivaji embodied all the qualities that politicians should possess in 21st century India, but do not always have: he was just, firm and stood for the weak; he was an honest and able administrator; he confronted the enemy and was not cowed into submission; he was devoted to Mother India who appeared to him as Bhavani; he was ruthless with his enemies, but spared women, children and his own people; he would go to both Muslim and Hindu saints and endowed mosques as well as temples.

Shivaji visits Agra:- On 14th June 1665 Shivaji concluded the Treaty of Purandar with Mirza Raja Jai Singh after approval of the terms by Emperor Aurangzeb. By this Treaty Shivaji had to surrender two-third of his important forts. The Treaty was a set-back to him and he had to take stock of his position vis-avis the Mughal government. But how he could do that without personally assessing the actual state of the Mughal power.

It was natural for Shivaji to feel great hesitation in agreeing to visit Agra to meet the Emperor for which Mirza Raja Jai Singh was insisting so much and was urging the Emperor with equal force to receive a visit from the Maratha hero. "Test his hearty goodwill and convert him into a powerful supporter for the peace in the southern dominion", he had urged the Emperor. Jai Singh and his eldest son, Kunwar Ram Singh, stood guarantee for Shivaji's life and safety. The visit, though not without hazards in view of Aurangzeb's known character and dubious record, offered Shivaji an opportunity to get a 'realistic' idea of the power of the Mughal Empire and held forth other opportunities as well, making it worth a trial.

After making as perfect arrangements as possible for his work being carried in his absence, Shivaji set out from Raigad on 5 March 1666, with his son Shambhaji, and a select following of officials and servants and an escort of about 4000 men, for Agra. His arrival in Agra was to coincide with the 50th lunar birthday of Aurangzeb on which occasion a grand *darbar* was to be held on 12th May 1666. Emperor Aurangzeb had not visited Agra after wresting the crown from his father Shah Jahan till after the latter's death and hurried and unceremonial burial on 22nd January 1666.

When presented before the Emperor, the latter did not exchange a word with Shivaji who was conducted to stand in the line of the *mansabdars* of 5000 rank. When *Khilats* were presented to Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur and two or three other nobles of high rank, Shivaji was ignored. Shivaji angrily left the Court, loudly exclaiming words of displeasure at being slighted,

and refused to see the Emperor again, or accept a *mansab* or a *khilat*. There are a number of contemporary letters in Rajasthani which describe the whole sequence of developments. Shivaji remained in Agra till 18th August in virtual confinement till he managed to regain his freedom outwitting the wildest Emperor ever to occupy the Mughal throne.

Shivaji is a very brave high souled man. The people had been praising his high spirit and courage before. Now that after coming to the Emperor's presence he has shown such audacity and returned such harsh and strong replies, the public extols him for his bravery all the more".

Shivaji's Navy & Shivaji, the father of the Maratha Navy - his object:

Shivaji and his people had inherited a great military tradition, but the sea was a new element to them. There is no evidence in the past or in the history of the Yadavas of Devgiri of any attempt to build a naval power to rule the waves. Shivaji is, therefore, rightly hailed as the father of the Maratha Navy.

The coast line of the Konkan broken by many creeks, offered excellent shelter for ships, and the rocky islands near the coast presented excellent sites for naval strongholds. Quite early in his wonderful career, he realized the necessity of a strong fighting fleet for the peace of his country, the safety of his subjects, and the prosperity of his ports, which should not be at the mercy of other naval powers – the English, Portuguese, the Siddis, and Dutch. A strong Navy, he knew, would ensure for the Maratha merchant vessels free navigation of sea and they would not be required to seek permission of Goa or obtain Portuguese pass-ports, which were given on certain conditions

Naval Enterprises

Of his Naval expeditions, four are more prominently mentioned. In February 1665 he himself set out for Basrur with his army in a fleet, which, according to English Factory Records had 85 frigates and three great ships. In November 1670, a fleet of 160 sail was assembled at Nandgaon (in Kolaba district) under Daria Sarang, the Admiral of the Fleet. In 1675 Shivaji sent 40 vessels full of war material by sea to be used in the capture of Phonda, which, along with Karwar, were two important posts south of Goa. Sometime later, his naval forces occupied island of Kenery, but all attempts to subdue the island Janjira, the stronghold of the *Siddis*, from where three carried out plundering raids against the mainland, failed.

Conclusion

So yes he is a national hero but not for fighting against Mughals but because he was a great man. Indeed he is a national icon and deserves great respect. The 17th-century Maratha emperor Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is considered as the 'Father of the Indian Navy'.

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